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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 7196  
INFO RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ALMATY 5386  
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK 2850  
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 0017  
RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT 4945  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 1622

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000387

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE  
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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/CEN AND DRL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: BLOW YOUR HOUSE DOWN: CONTINUED DESTRUCTION OF  
ASHGABAT'S NEIGHBORHOODS

REF: ASHGABAT 260

Sensitive but Unclassified - Please Handle Accordingly.

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Summary  
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¶1. (SBU) While Ashgabat's main streets continue to resemble a large construction site in pursuit of President Niyazov's campaign to "transform" the city, several of Ashgabat's neighborhoods tell a different story. There, residents continue to receive little notice before being forced out of their homes to make way for the latest planned construction project. The GOTX claims to have a master plan for construction activities; however, anecdotal accounts suggest that Niyazov's decisions to destroy certain neighborhoods are largely arbitrary. End Summary.

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Only God and Turkmenbashy Know  
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¶2. (SBU) On April 11, Poloff and Pol-Econ Assistant visited a neighborhood near the DCM's residence, where many of the homes are in the process of being destroyed. Post understands that Niyazov may have decided to raze the neighborhood as he drove past it one day on the way to open a new power plant (reftel). Among the remains of several other houses, emboffs observed eight men with sledgehammers destroying the roof of one house, while nearby a large tractor was tearing down the wall surrounding a second residence. The homeowners, including one who was visibly pregnant, said that they had been given about one month's notice before they had to start destroying the homes. Both women said that the families were paying to destroy their own homes and remove the debris so that they could salvage the construction materials, and that they would have nowhere to go once demolition was complete.

¶3. (SBU) Shortly after emboffs' arrival at the demolition site, a local government official appeared on the scene and ordered the homeowners to stop talking and get back to work. Pol-Econ Assistant overheard the official tell one of the women that he would call the police if demolition of her house did not proceed faster. The local official told emboffs that a new "Ruhnama University" and medical institute would be built on the site, and that displaced residents would be compensated with land near the Tolkuchka Bazaar. He responded to emboffs' question about future removal of other homes in the area by saying that "only God and the President

know" if they will be destroyed.

14. (SBU) One of DCM's neighbors told her on April 15 that though all residents of the neighborhood had received eviction notices on the president's birthday in February, when residents went to local authorities for clarification they were told demolition was postponed "indefinitely." "Maybe by months, maybe by years," an official reportedly told them. According to DCM's neighbor, the president apparently changed his mind to tear down the whole neighborhood and proceeded with ordering just the most visible houses standing on a small bluff be torn down. "He goes little by little," the neighbor said, "he'll tear down ten houses to see if there is any reaction, but won't risk tearing down hundreds at a time." The neighbor was speaking specifically of DCM's neighborhood where the once influential residents received their plots directly from the president. Other neighborhoods without these connections have been torn down in their entirety.

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Comment  
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15. (SBU) A few residents admitted to emboffs that they had originally received land in the area to build dachas and grow crops. However, they claimed that the GOTX had informally told them they could build homes in the area and that they would receive documentation of this decision in the future. Instead, many have gotten nothing more than an eviction notice and vague promises of land elsewhere in the city. Meanwhile, nearby construction continues on a large home nearby reportedly belonging to the head of the Ministry of National Security. As much as anything else, this

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demonstrates the arbitrary nature of GOTX construction policy. In many respects, Ashgabat is turning into a visually striking and impressive city. However, we should not lose sight of the fact that the gleaming white marble buildings are constructed on top of ground taken from ordinary citizens who benefit little, if at all, from the GOTX's drive to "transform" Ashgabat into a "modern" city.  
End Comment.

JACOBSON